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NEWS-LETTER

Judgment at Nuremburg

SUPPLEMENT

KARL BARTH ON THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

By J. H. O.

THE PRONOUNCEMENT of judgment at Nuremberg has overshadowed all other items of news during the past fortnight. Discussion of the significance of this event will go on for years. We are still too near to this event to pass any final judgment upon it: that must be left to future generations.

POLICY AND LAW

The Court was an International Military Tribunal, set up by agreement between the four Great Powers and deriving its authority from the right of conquest. In it there were present two elements: that of political decision by the possessors of power, and that of judicial process.

So such an admixture of power and law is far from being exceptional, it is present in all the structures and systems in which men try to embody the principles and rules of ideal justice. Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr constantly points out that no historical community is held together by a harmony achieved by law alone. Every community contains a compromise between the ideal demands of law and morality and an equilibrium between competing centres of power. In every legal system there is operative in some degree the selfish interest or at the best the point of view of those who frame and administer it.

The victor nations could have decided to act purely politically if they had ordered the shooting of the Nazi

leaders out of hand in the last days of the war or had condemned them by drumhead court martial, few would probably have been found to protest. It would have passed with much else as an act of war. In fact they chose the alternative course of a public trial by a bench of judges nominated by the chief allied Governments.

What can we say of this tremendous drama which has been enacted for more than a year before the eyes of the world? Is it an epoch-making step towards a true law of nations? Or is it merely the dressing up of naked power in the robes of legal procedure?

THE TRIAL AND JUDGMENT

For the conduct of the trial there can be little but praise. The Court was dignified and restrained. There have been none of the disgusting crudities which turned the trial of Laval into a ridiculing of French judicial procedure. The evidence was collected and sifted with the utmost care, made available to the defence as well as the prosecution and put on record for all time. The defence was given a full and patient hearing. Many of the pleas of the prosecution were disallowed. There was discrimination in regard to degrees of guilt, and three of the accused were acquitted.

The counts on which the Nuremberg judgment is based fall into two different main categories—first war crimes and crimes against humanity, and second crimes against peace, or preparation for and waging aggressive war. In regard to the former class doubts about jurisdiction might be over-ridden by the flagrant nature of the wrong. The right of the victor to try by court-martial individuals among the enemy who have committed atrocities against his nationals in violation of the acknowledged rules of war has long been recognized. The offences of the Nazis have never been exceeded, and the evidence of guilt in the case of most of the accused was overwhelming. It is a sound instinct of the ordinary man that it is not right that the small man should be punished for a lesser wrong while the bigger criminals go free—that a man should hang if he commits one murder, and pay no penalty if he

deliberately puts millions to death. On these counts the broad justice of the verdict can hardly be questioned.

Greater difficulty is raised for some minds by the counts relating to the waging of aggressive war. The judgment itself states with admirable clearness the objections urged by the defence: "*ex post facto* punishment is abhorrent to the law of all civilized nations, no sovereign power had made aggressive war a crime at the time the alleged criminal acts were committed, no statute had defined aggressive war, no penalty had been fixed for its commission and no court had been created to try and punish offenders." Has the breach, it may be asked, of even the most solemn treaties ever before been regarded as involving the statesmen concerned in liability? Since all wars are in the eyes of victor nations aggression by their enemies, is not a precedent being set for the capital punishment of the political leaders of nations which suffer defeat in war? It may be contended, on the other hand, that in this particular instance the evidence was overwhelming of the peculiarly cold-blooded deliberation and premeditation with which Hitler and his associates planned aggressive war; that this planning took place after the Kellogg Pact of 1928 in which the nations unconditionally condemned and expressly renounced recourse to war as an instrument of policy; that aggressive war is, as the Tribunal maintains, the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole; and that what is novel is not the enunciation of the law, but the creation of the Court to try crimes against it, thus remedying what has hitherto been the great defect and weakness of international law. There are clearly here many deep questions calling for further clarification.

"THOU THAT JUDGEST ANOTHER"

The greatest disquiet to Christian consciences, however, arises from the fact that the nations sitting in judgment themselves remain exempt from the law that they have proclaimed. Appalling crimes were committed by the European

Axis, which ought not to go unpunished. But are there no crimes for which the victors ought to be brought to the bar of judgment? Is there not, inevitably, a debatable margin, enough to start the suspicion that it depends on who wins a war what crimes will be found? If one of the grounds of condemnation of the accused is that "cities and towns and villages were wantonly destroyed without military justification or necessity", what about the American bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the British obliteration of German cities? If "deportations of whole populations for the purposes of slave labour" are condemned as a crime against humanity, what judgment is to be passed on similar actions performed or acquiesced in by the United Nations? The question has to be asked why among the atrocities brought forward at the trial no mention was made of one of the most abominable deeds of which the Germans have been accused—the murder of 11,000 Polish officers whose bodies were found in Katyn wood. The trial at Nuremberg will be a travesty of justice unless the victor nations allow their own policies and actions to be judged by the standards that have been laid down and bring their own practice into conformity with them. The *Manchester Guardian* rightly insists that, if the victors prove themselves to be the champions of civilization, democracy and peace, as the Soviet prosecutor described them at the trial, Nuremberg will establish a great and salutary precedent; but that if, on the contrary, they continue to behave as nations have behaved in the past, "it will seem no more than the quirk of an oddly-assorted bunch of victors; something to be justified only by the peculiar enormity of the band of men who suffered from it".

DELIVER US FROM EVIL

The men who stood in the dock at Nuremberg had their hands deeply steeped in blood. Not tens or thousands, but millions of lives lie to their account and all they have to offer in requital is the few remaining years of their own little lives. Between desert and penalty there can be no equivalence. The Nuremberg trial has brought home to all men an understanding of the depths and ascendancy of evil. What has only

been understood in recent years by Dostoevsky and a very few others is suddenly, perhaps only momentarily, clear to all.

In this pervasive evil we feel that we are all in some sense implicated. These men, after all, arose out of our own civilization. The realization of the unspeakable depths to which men's hearts can sink is terrifying. Most of us, who are Christians, have not really believed with Jeremiah that the heart of man is " deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Now we see the depths to which man—any man—might fall. We might well despair were there not in the love of God on the Cross sources of redemptive and healing power made available to men to combat the powers of darkness.

THE SUPPLEMENT

Professor Karl Barth needs as little introduction to many of our readers as the late Archbishop Temple. But for those for whom he is little more than a name, it may be said that he is the most powerful of living theologians. He has changed the whole outlook of theology, compelling it to face new questions. But he is also much more than a theologian. He is alive to all that is going on in the world and has played his part in public affairs, he has a profound understanding of communion. He took the lead in determining the point of view of the Confessional Church conflict with Nazism in Germany. He was from the outset a staunch opponent of Hitler and throughout the war was an outstanding figure on the European scene.

Barthe's latest volume, published this year in Switzerland, is unlikely to be translated and published in English for some time. Dr. Oldham has, therefore, summarized the main argument of his book, which has a relevance far beyond theological circles.

Kathleen Bliss

KARL BARTH ON THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION

THE publication of a further volume of Karl Barth's massive *Kirkliche Dogmatik* is a notable event; the more so, because this third volume is concerned with the doctrine of creation. It appears at a moment when human and other life on this planet, which Christians believe to be part of God's creation, are threatened with destruction by the hands of man. The question presses on all of us what we are to believe about the meaning and purpose of the world and of human existence. Many will turn eagerly to this volume to know what light so profound and powerful a Christian mind as Barth's can shed on it.

The aim of this supplement is to give readers of the Christian News-Letter who have not access to the volume, or have not the leisure to read its nearly five hundred large, closely printed pages, some inkling of its contents.

The purpose of the volume stands out with unmistakable clearness. It is to expound and vindicate the assertion of Christian faith, first, that the world, because it has been created by God, is not deception or dream, but real; and, secondly that, because it has been created by the God and Father of Jesus Christ, it is, both in the fact and in the manner of its existence, *good*. God has said "Yes" to his creation. The whole volume is a closely argued and passionate re-affirmation of this Christian belief. An uncompromising verdict of this kind is not what many people would have expected to hear from Barth, but the intensity of his conviction of its truth is manifest on every page.

Such a declaration of faith may well seem astonishing and incredible to a generation which has lived through two world-wars, sees around it a disintegrating society and has hanging over it the threat of extermination by atomic and biological warfare. The assertion is flatly opposed not only to the teachings of great oriental religions, but to many powerful strains of western pessimism. On what grounds, then, are we justified in committing ourselves to so daring a faith?

I

BELIEF IN CREATION AN ARTICLE OF FAITH

The book contains three main sections, each of which expounds a central thesis. The thesis of the first section is that the insight that man owes both the fact and the manner of his existence to God's creation is attained only through acceptance of, and response to, God's revelation of himself; that is to say, through faith in Jesus Christ and through a life mediated by him under the rule of the Creator and in the experience of his goodness towards his creatures. The doctrine of creation, just as much as the other contents of the Christian confession, is an article of faith.

How do we come to know—not suppose, nor infer, nor postulate, but *know*—with the certainty with which the Church throughout its history has confessed this faith, that God created heaven and earth? It is not simply because it is recorded in the Bible, but because the Bible from first to last bears witness to Jesus Christ who is its centre, and because the story of creation, like the rest of the contents of the Bible, derives its meaning from that centre. Jesus Christ is the guarantee of the reality both of the creation and of the Creator.

Faith in Jesus Christ, which includes faith in God the Creator, is the adoption of a practical attitude, a decision. It is the acknowledgment that the created world is at God's disposal as the scene, instrument and object of his activity. To believe in Jesus Christ is to live in the presence of the Creator. In Jesus Christ we are confronted with the Creator of the whole of reality.

If the life of the Christian is life in the presence of the Creator, it is life in the actual experience and acknowledgment of his power over all things and all conditions. It is life in the experience and acknowledgment of his right and lordship over his creatures. It is life in the acknowledgment and experience of the good-will, companionship and love of the Creator towards those whom he has created.

II

CREATION AND THE COVENANT

The thesis of the second section is that the purpose, and consequently the meaning, of creation, is the making possible

of the history of God's covenant with man, which has its beginning, centre and end in Jesus Christ. Creation is the indispensable pre-condition for the realization of God's purpose of love towards his creatures ; it is the arena for the working out of the history of the covenant of grace.

Everything that weakens or obscures the connection between creation and God's covenant with man undermines the affirmation that the created world is good. Any attempt to know the created world apart from the covenant, any attempt to understand it as something given in itself, to which God's dealings with men are super-added, leaves us with nothing more solid than a subjective opinion.

Just as the creation provides the external environment for the history of God's dealings with men, so the covenant is the *inner* ground of creation. God did not use his power and wisdom to create any kind of a world, but one which could be the setting for the manifestation of his free love to men. Creation is more than the necessary condition, announcement and promise of the covenant of grace ; it typifies and anticipates it. Jesus Christ is the beginning as well as the goal.

THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF CREATION

The biblical account of creation is contained in the first two chapters of Genesis. It is given in the form of what Barth calls in German *Sage*. Most English writers would probably speak of the biblical myth. But Barth objects strongly to the use of the word " myth ", though he admits that there is as yet little agreement among scholars about the distinctions of meaning between myth, saga, fairy-tale and legend.

By *Sage*, Barth means the picture formed by intuition and the poetic imagination of a definite, concrete, real, pre-historical event. *Sage* is not history ; the account of the creation cannot be history since it relates to what took place before history began. At the same time it is an account of something that *happened*. It is not simply the assertion of an eternal truth.

It is a profound error to suppose that the Word of God cannot come to us through *Sage* ; the Word of God reaches us in the Bible in many forms—not only in history but in teaching,

meditation, legal precepts, epigrams, lyric and many other modes. What matters is that in and through all these forms we find God confronting us and addressing us.

Not only does Barth insist that the account in Genesis is not history but *Sage*, but he recognizes also that it contains a large human element. The authors of the story were conditioned by their time and environment and subject to the limitations and defects of their imagination. The treasure of revelation is here, as always, mediated through earthly vessels. It is through this human medium, liable at every point to error and mistake, that God has chosen to reveal himself. It is just where the human element is most obvious and disturbing, however, that a wise interpreter will proceed most carefully and reverently, in order that he may not miss the Word of God that is being spoken through such frail instruments. Nearly half of Barth's volume, therefore, consists of a painstaking examination of the text of the first two chapters of Genesis, every sentence and every turn of phrase in them being made to yield up its full charge of meaning.

The real wonder of the biblical story of creation is that in it we see men, in the degree proportionate to their capacities of apperception and representation, confronted with the reality of God's self-revelation. Through the content of this *Sage* Israelitish man found himself confronted by God, the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. It is of this encounter that he bears witness in the story of creation. Only through the imagination could he experience this encounter. The important thing is not that the encounter should be presented in this imaginative form, but that the imagination should have precisely this content. Why did the imagination of Israelitish man not wander freely through the wide fields of myth? Why is it that here, and here alone, and not in the Babylonian and Egyptian imagination, we are confronted with a real Creator? It is this that differentiates the biblical story absolutely from all other accounts of the creation of the world that seem superficially to resemble it. The absolute nature of this difference is fully evident, however, only to those who hold firmly to the connection between the biblical story of creation and the covenant of grace and are themselves partakers of that covenant.

THE BIBLICAL STORY AND NATURAL SCIENCE

Barth tells us in his preface that many readers will probably want to know why no attempt is made in this volume to come to terms with the questions of natural science which lie so near at hand. He himself thought at first that he would not be able to avoid dealing with them, until it became clear to him that to what the Bible and the Christian Church understand by creation, the questions, objections and supports of natural science are quite irrelevant. Hence, while a large part of his book is taken up with the " naive " sage of Genesis, it contains nothing of the apologetic or polemic for which some readers might look. Natural science has an entirely free field for its investigations outside of what theology has to describe as the work of the Creator, and theology may, and must, move freely where natural science, in so far as it is truly natural science and not a disguised form of pagan gnosis, reaches its limit. Barth admits, however, that there are many real and rewarding problems for others to take up in determining the nature and limits of the respective fields of theology and natural science and the boundary line between them.

MAN

The Christine doctrine of man is to be the theme of a further volume which is nearly ready for publication, and is not treated at length in this one. But what is said here about man re-enforces and gives fuller content to the main argument about the relation between creation and the covenant of grace.

How does Barth understand the words, " Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness " ? The high significance attached by the writer in Genesis to the final stage in creation is marked by the use of a new form of narrative ; in place of the impersonal " Let there be light ", " Let the earth bring forth ", God deliberates with himself. Up to this point all that had been created was an existence other than God and different from God, but there was not yet a Second over against God. The rest of creation has its existence alongside of God and in relation to God, but man is a being who exists over against God and for God, in the relationship of an I to a Thou.

Man's likeness to God is not found in any quality possessed by man in himself. It is idle, therefore, to ask in what particular

characteristic or attitude it consists. Man's likeness to God lies in the fact that God created man to be his partner, a *person* with whom he could have dealings and enter into relations.

Just as man has this over-againstness, this power of communication, this capacity of address and response in his relation to God, so also he has it in relation to his fellow human beings. The analogy between God and man consists in this relationship between persons, in the answer of an I to a Thou.

The author of the biblical narrative in his account of the crowning act of creation, makes no reference to man's intellectual or moral endowments. There is no mention of his rational nature. The one and only thing that the writer tells us is that " male and female created he them ". The difference of sex is the only difference that is essential to man. The distinctions of type and group, of tribe and race, are not fundamental. Man exists as man not in isolation, but in the duality of man and woman. In his relation to God he is united inseparably to another of his own kind. In the second narrative of creation in Genesis God declares : " It is not good that man should be alone ; I will make him a help meet for him." In the human relationship of man and woman we have the great paradigm or pattern of all communication between man and God and between man and his fellowmen. What constitutes him man is that he exists in fellowship—in the mutual dependence of man and woman.

III

GOD'S " YES " TO HIS CREATION

The greater part of the volume having been given to the relation between creation and the covenant, Barth turns in a concluding section to consider the character of creation in itself. The thesis of this concluding section is that God's work in creation implies his " yes " of approval for what he has created. Creation is an act of divine benevolence, an expression of God's goodness.

This means, in the first place, that the created world is real. We cannot obtain that assurance from our own consciousness of ourselves or of the world. We may find strong and convincing reasons in our own consciousness for believing that we our-

selves and the world about us are real and that God exists. But many able minds have questioned this and have believed the world to be mere appearance. It is only when we encounter God and hear him speaking to us, that we know with an absolute certainty that he is real and that we ourselves to whom he speaks are also real, and that he has placed us in a real world. When that knowledge comes to us, we possess an unshakeable certainty and our attitude can only be one of thankful rejoicing and jubilation in the existence of the Creator. It is in the Christian revelation that this knowledge receives its strongest confirmation and full completion. In the good news of Jesus Christ who reveals to us a God of grace we have the final, immovable assurance of the reality both of the creature and of the creator.

In the second place, God's " yes " to his creation means that God has justified it, pronouncing it to be right and good. The assertion that the created world is good is a more daring and precarious one than the assertion that it is real.

SECULAR AND CHRISTIAN OPTIMISM

Very little attempt is made in this volume to come to terms with alternatives to the Christian view. A few pages are given to an examination of the teaching of Schopenhauer as the outstanding exponent of modern pessimism. Barth is more interested, however, in the philosophical *optimism* of the early part of the eighteenth century, which in its interpretation of the world as essentially good comes nearest to the biblical doctrine of the goodness of creation. To this parallel the last thirty pages of the volume are devoted in the form of an excursus in small type.

The leading exponent of eighteenth-century optimism was the philosopher Leibnitz. It was grounded in Christian theism and its language is often indistinguishable from that of orthodox Christian theology. For Leibnitz the decisive reason why we must be wholly satisfied with nature and fate is that they are determined by God, in whom all perfections are united and who acts invariably in the most perfect and desirable way. It follows from this that the world that exists is the best of possible worlds. Leibnitz recognized the existence of evil, but he refused in spite of our inability to explain it to admit that it was a final and insoluble riddle.

This optimistic view of the world was worked out by followers of Leibnitz in books which set out to show in detail how nature in all its aspects bore witness to the omnipotence, wisdom, goodness and righteousness of God. Most of this literature strikes the modern reader as insufferably tedious. But none the less we find here, in contrast with the attitude of resentment and indifference characteristic of other periods of history, finding expression, for example, in the spiteful jibes and grimaces of Voltaire, a sustained confidence that the created world is in its actual existence good. It is surprising to find, less than a century after the devastation of the Thirty Years' War, a settled, prevailing temper of thankfulness for the world and praise of its Creator. The fact that this mood was historically conditioned, and that after the turning point of the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 it gave place to other moods of a very different kind, is no assurance that it may not some day recur. In any case, it is something that has to be taken very seriously by Christian theology, because it resembles so closely what ought to be the Christian delight and rejoicing in the work of God the Creator.

But none the less this eighteenth-century optimism had its grave weaknesses. The most striking of these was that the darker side of life was largely ignored or explained away. The realities of evil, sin and death were never fully faced. Along with this went a certain lack of sureness, leading to a strained overemphasis, in the positive affirmation of the world. What is the explanation of this strange but unmistakable limitation of what was strongest in eighteenth-century optimism? It is undoubtedly that the verdict was in the last resort man's own verdict on himself and his environment. Between the optimism of the eighteenth century and Christian faith there is, notwithstanding the striking similarities, a fundamental difference. The former recognized, like the latter, that a clear choice has to be made between the good and evil aspects of the world, and it made the right choice. The ostensible ground of that choice, moreover, was an appeal to the name of God. But the argument in reality moved in a circle. The idea of a Perfect Being was an inference derived from man's own observation and judgment of the world, and was then used to show that that judgment must necessarily be true. God was not essential to the argument, and

it was not too difficult for the atheists to contend later that the idea of a Creator was superfluous. The optimism was rooted in man's confidence in himself and could survive only as long as that confidence remained unshaken.

If man's self-confidence is not a sufficient ground on which to base belief in the goodness of creation, what other ground is there for such a faith? The answer is found, as Barth insists with one hammer-blow after another, in the intimate and inseparable connection between creation and the covenant of grace. Take away the revelation in Jesus Christ, and there is no valid ground for believing that the created world is good. Apart from that revelation the invocation of a good God can be no more than the assertion of the truth, validity and authority of our own desire, valuation and assurance.

The assertion in Genesis that God saw that everything that he had made was very good must not be interpreted apart from its context in an abstract sense as a description of the cosmos. The created world as it actually exists is good because it is in its substance and structure the right place and the right instrument for the work of God which has its beginning, middle and end in Jesus Christ.

The created world has undoubtedly what may be called its bright side. Direct, immanent goodness is most certainly a part of reality. Christians are not only permitted, but commanded to rejoice in it. It is not those who laugh and are merry that need to feel shame before the holiness of God, but those who refrain from laughter and still more those who scoff in bitter irony. But the created world has also its dark side—its lost condition, its apparent meaninglessness, its limitations, its accidents, its decay, its unhappiness, and misery. The uncompromising acknowledgment of all this is required of those who are confronted by the Creator in his self-revelation. We should not be in earnest with life, unless the revelation of God made us ready to do justice to the whole of reality and affirm its goodness not merely partially, but in its totality.

The self-revelation of God at once confirms and transcends *both* aspects of life as we experience them. It affirms the reality of both, but is not bound up with, or dependent on, either. In

the Incarnation God has made the whole of human experience his own. Since in his own person he has drunk the cup of both aspects of existence, it is not open to us to withdraw ourselves from either the joy or the sorrow of the world. We have not ourselves to wrestle with the contradiction and overcome it. It has been borne and overcome for us. What meaning has creation apart from the confidence that it exists for the sake of the covenant and in the covenant between God and man?

While the self-revelation of God confirms and emphasizes the two aspects of the world, it does not present them as unchanging elements in the constitution of the world, held together in equal balance and stable equilibrium. God's participation in the suffering and death of his creation is not eternal, but was transient, Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more. He lives now eternally, not only as God, but as man, of whose created nature he partook. Here the final word is spoken and the perfection of creation is at last made plain.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE MODERN MIND

What has been said may afford some indication of the direction of Barth's thinking. No summary can convey an impression of the vigour and force of the exposition. But even an outline of Barth's position cannot fail to raise questions in the minds of many readers.

Barth deliberately refrains, as has been already noted, from any discussion of the relation between the Christian doctrine of creation and the conclusions of natural science. But the problem which confronts us to-day is wider and deeper than the relation between the Bible and natural science. It is the whole Christian outlook that is in conflict with the modern attitude. For the Christian the acts of God in creation and the redemption are the ultimate setting of human life and history. For the modern mind, Christianity, however significant, is an episode in a cosmic and historical process, our knowledge of which is derived from other sources than the Christian revelation. That knowledge provides the framework into which Christianity has to be fitted. The consequence is that Christians to-day suffer from a divided consciousness. A leading Christian thinker has said that the

modern Christian does not exist. There are modern men responsive to the thought of their time who are also Christians, and there are Christians who live in the actual contemporary world, which they can only do by accepting or acquiescing in many of its assumptions. But no mind has yet been able to relate in a satisfactory manner the two ways of viewing the world.

Barth has seen with unequalled clearness the danger that Christianity may be robbed of its essence by accommodation, consciously or unconsciously, to modern thought. If it is no more than a gloss on what man can attain to by his own knowledge, it ceases to be important. Barth has roused himself to combat this danger. Seldom has there arisen a more doughty fighter. When he says in his preface that readers will find in this volume nothing of polemic, this statement is not quite accurate. His treatment of modern philosophical optimism and philosophical pessimism is masterly. He is most convincing when he is driving people relentlessly out of half-way houses and untenable refuges. He leaves us under no illusion where we must in the end arrive if, consciously or unconsciously, we make man rather than God and his self-revelation our starting-point.

In regard to the problem of healing the divided consciousness of those who are both Christians and modern men, Barth does not give us much direct help. His great service is that he compels us to face the full implications of the Christian faith, and ruthlessly exposes the confusion and uncertainty in which the human mind is involved when that faith is denied. The challenge of his book is contained perhaps in the sentence: "It seems as though in the last resort no other choice remains except between atheism and faith in the self-revelation of God."

J. H. O.

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